Course Objectives

*If we knew what we were doing, it wouldn’t be called Research.*

—A. Einstein

This course is designed as an advanced introduction to professional research practice. You will develop your own research project based on your individual interests. But this course will not operate as if you were pursuing a set of unrelated independent studies. Though your topics will differ widely, you will all be facing similar research and writing problems: finding primary sources, understanding what your evidence means, presenting your findings in an interesting and compelling interpretation. Thus the subject of this course is not based on any particular historical period or topic, rather it is the historical method—the process of historical investigation, and particularly the role of writing in the research process. We will follow the approach of Booth, Colomb, and Williams, who explained in *The Craft of Research* that “writing is not just the last stage of a research project but from its beginning a guide to critical thinking.”

Your primary goal in this course is to write a compelling proposal for an original research project. You will develop the proposal in stages and, as in any professional grant competition, peer review will be an important part of the research process in the course.

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- Recognize and explain the AHA standards of professional conduct and research practice.
- Explain the role of archivists in the research process and use archival finding aids effectively as research tools for your project.
- Construct a meaningful original research problem with clearly defined research goals.
- Construct a well-designed research bibliography that contains the most relevant primary and secondary sources for your project.
- Demonstrate your mastery of historiography by explaining the significance and contribution of your research to the appropriate historical field(s) of scholarship.
• Identify and apply the best methodologies for successfully addressing your research goals.
• Use NEH guidelines to identify and employ best practices in grant proposal writing in the humanities.

Course Readings


Required Style Manual:

Journal Articles (Journal Finder and Reserves):


Websites:
NEH policy on research misconduct:  
http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/researchmisconduct.html

AHA Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct  
http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm#SharedValues

Models of grant competitions in the humanities:  
http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/fellowships.html
http://www.americanantiquarian.org/longterm.htm
“The Information Cycle”
http://www.libraries.psu.edu/instruction/infocycle/infocycle.html
(requires Flashplayer 5.0 for viewing. If you do not have Flash 5.0 see
http://www.libraries.psu.edu/instruction/infocycle/ to download.)

Evaluation

Class Participation 10%
Long Research Proposal 60%
Short Research Proposal 30%

There will be a series of required, research and writing exercises designed to help you develop your proposal in stages. The work you produce will be an important focus of class discussion throughout the semester. It is therefore essential that you complete this work on time. Your class participation grade will be based in part on the quality of your work on these assignments. See the following due dates:

2 September Preliminary Topic Description (use form posted on Bb). Distribute your topic description to the class list by noon on Tuesday, September 2. All students should read all of the topic overviews and come to class prepared with questions and strategies for developing the focus of each topic idea.

18 September Research Strategies. You are pursuing a research project about the entrepreneurial activities of slaves in the antebellum era. Use the online SHC finding aids: http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv.html to locate at least one folder or box you would request with research potential for the project. Write a 1-2 page description and analysis of your research process. Your analysis should contain the following information: Explain two or three different search strategies you used and evaluate which one worked best. Also explain the rationale for your final folder/box selection based on how your choice fits your overall research goal. How did you modify your research goal to make it more feasible based on your preliminary search of the finding aids?

2 October Historiography section due. Select five (5) of the most important works of scholarship for your project and write a historiographical essay that places your project in the context of this scholarship. This essay represents a draft of one section of your final proposal. You may decide to change the scholarship you address in your final proposal. Your essay should be about 12-15 pages. Include a full bibliography of the secondary sources for your project.

14 October Research Problem due. Distribute a statement of your research problem to the class list by the end of the work day on Tuesday 14 October.
3 November  **Methodology** section and revised bibliography due. Detailed instructions will be provided. Deliver your assignment to me **by noon on Monday 3 November**.

13 November  **Short Proposal** due (3 single-spaced pages or 6 double-spaced pages)
Distribute to the class.

4 December  **Long Proposal** due (20-25 pages)

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**Course Schedule**

**28 August**  Getting started: course goals and how we’ll achieve them

**What is a Research Proposal?**

**4 September**  Standards of Professional Conduct/What is original research?/Practical approaches for defining a workable research topic

**Read:**
NEH policy on research misconduct:

AHA Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct
[http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm#SharedValues](http://www.historians.org/pubs/Free/ProfessionalStandards.cfm#SharedValues)

Models of grant competitions for the humanities: (Note: pay particular attention to the guidelines for preparing proposals described on each of these sites.)
[http://www.americanantiquarian.org/longterm.htm](http://www.americanantiquarian.org/longterm.htm)

**Watch:**
“**The Information Cycle**”:
[http://www.libraries.psu.edu/instruction/infocycle/infocycle.html](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/instruction/infocycle/infocycle.html)
(requires Flashplayer 5.0 for viewing. If you do not have Flash 5.0 see [http://www.libraries.psu.edu/instruction/infocycle/](http://www.libraries.psu.edu/instruction/infocycle/) to download.)

**Assignment:**  Preliminary topic overview using the form posted to the web. Distribute your topic description to the class list **by noon on Tuesday, September 2**. All students should read all of the topic overviews and come to class prepared with questions and strategies for developing the focus of each topic idea.
11 September  
**Epistemology of History**

**Read:**

18 September  
**Finding Evidence: Working with archivists on the web and in the archive**

**Read:**


**Assignment:** You are pursuing a research project about the entrepreneurial activities of slaves in the antebellum era. Use the online SHC finding aids: [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv.html) to locate at least one folder or box you would request with research potential for the project. Write a 1-2 page description and analysis of your research process. Your analysis should contain the following information: Explain two or three different search strategies you used and evaluate which one worked best. Also explain the rationale for your final folder/box selection based on how your choice fits your overall research goal. How did you modify your research goal to make it more feasible based on your preliminary search of the finding aids?

### What is the Role of Historiography in the Research Process?

25 September  
**What is historiography?**

**Read:**


2 October  
**No Class**

**Assignment:** Select five (5) of the most important works of scholarship for your project and write a [historiographical essay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historiography) that places your project in the context of this scholarship. This essay represents a draft of one section of your final proposal. You may decide to change the scholarship you address in your final proposal. Your essay should be about 12-15 pages. Include a full [bibliography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibliography) of the secondary sources for your project.

9 October  
**What is the difference between a research topic and a research problem?**

**Read:**
16 October  
What’s your problem?

Assignment:  
Distribute a statement of your research problem to the class list by the end of the work day on Tuesday 14 October.

What is Methodology?

23 October  
It’s about the nature of the evidence you are using

Read:


30 October  
It’s about the strategies you employ for analyzing your evidence

Read:


Assignment: Bring to class photocopies of 1-2 pages of a secondary source from your research bibliography in which the scholar discusses a methodological issue that is important for your project or research goals.

Putting the Final Proposal(s) Together

6 November  the short version vs. the long version
Assignment: Methodology section and revised bibliography due by noon on Monday 3 November.

13 November  TBA
Assignment: Short proposal due (3 single-spaced pages or 6 double-spaced pages).  
Distribute to class list.

20 November  Short Proposal/peer review

27 November  Thanksgiving Holiday

4 December  Final Long Proposal due (20-25 pages)